# **December Meeting Minutes**

Council Members Present: Jack Buckley, Jennifer Wilson, Dicken Crane, Melissa Harper, Susan Smiley, Vivian Ortiz, Jeff Collins, Ted Dooley, Dennis Smith, Kevin O’Shea

Council Members Absent: Phil Doherty, Ann Canedy

DCR Staff Attendees: Brian Arrigo, Paul Cavanagh, John Daly, Matthew Perry

Public Attendees as Registered**:** Chris Mancini, Chris Egan, Michael Munchbach, Lizzie Roche, Mike Duclos, Denis LaForce, Paul Cavanagh, Sarah Freeman, Chuck Anastas, Suzanne Gall Marsh, Alex Simmons, Aimee Graeber, Buzz Constable

## Call to Meeting, 10:00am – Chair Jack Buckley

Chair Buckley welcomed those in attendance and thanked them for being there. He invited Senator Will Brownsberger to say a few words.

Senator Brownsberger thanked the Council for their service, saying nothing happens without the people that make it happen. He welcomed them to the Senate Reading room and gave the history behind it, saying that it used to be the Senate chamber with the House chamber across the hall where the current Senate chamber is.

Chair Buckley thanked Senator Brownsberger for his support of DCR. He then took a roll call of councilors for attendance.

Chairman Buckley mentioned that Paul Jahnige, Director of the Office of Outdoor Recreation will be presenting to the council at the January meeting. He said that he felt like it has been a good year for the council and for DCR, saying that Commissioner Arrigo has been doing a great job. He said that they have made progress on Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and that the council will be voting on one today, have continued making budget recommendations, and saw the creation of the new advocacy group, Mass Parks for All. Chair Buckley thanked all of the councilors for their work over the past year, including the chairs of the Committees, Councilor Smiley, Councilor Wilson, and Councilor Smith. He also thanked Mr. Perry for his help, and the rest of the DCR staff, including Patrice Kish, Kerry Harrison, and Paul Cavanagh, and those who have presented to the council. In addition, Chair Buckley thanked everyone who makes public comments to the council throughout the course of the year.

Chair Buckley brought up using the February Council as a chance to hold a joint meeting with the Fish and Wildlife board. He has been in touch with Chair Steve Sears of the DFW board and has talked about holding the meeting at the Fish and Wildlife Headquarters in Westborough at 4pm on February 15. A council meeting would be held at 1pm for two hours with a break in between before the joint meeting is held. He asked if this timing would work for councilors.

Councilor O’Shea asked if that the was the week of February vacation.

Councilor Collins said that it is the week before February vacation.

Councilor Wilson said that it seems like a long stretch of time, and suggested that the meeting doesn’t have to be held at the same time as the DFW board meeting.

Chair Buckley suggested that the Stewardship Council could meet from 2:00pm to 3:30pm with the joint meeting happening at 4:00pm.

Chair Buckley will work with Mr. Perry to schedule the meetings.

## DCR Report – Commissioner Brian Arrigo

Commissioner Arrigo thanked Chair Buckley and the Council. He then gave an update on recent activities at the agency.

### Welcome New Staff

Commissioner Arrigo welcomed Rob King, new Deputy Commissioner of Operations, who joins DCR from the Town of Brookline where he worked as the Director of Engineering & Transportation. Prior to his time in Brookline, he worked as program manager for strategic projects at the Massachusetts Port Authority, and he previously managed the Capital Projects and Engineering Departments for the City of Somerville. He has also served on the MBTA Advisory Board, the Boston Region Metropolitan Planning Organization and was a member of the Executive Committee for the MWRA Advisory Board.

### Recruitment Efforts

Commissioner Arrigo spoke about a new recruitment campaign to fill a number of full-time employee positions in DCR parks and operations, design and engineering, finance, legislative affairs, special events, and conservation and resource stewardship departments.

He thanked Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll, the Parks Caucus and their Chairs Senator Mike Rush and Representative Bruce Ayers, and Senator Will Brownsberger who created the Special Commission for their support of the agency and for giving DCR the ability to make these crucial hires.

### Go Green on Black Friday

The day after Thanksgiving, people around the state made their way to parks with their families for the Go Green on Black Friday Hikes at four participating parks: Blue Hills Reservation, Great Falls Discovery Center, Harold Parker State Forest, and Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, known as WBNERR. Commissioner Arrigo attended the hike at Blue Hills Reservation with his son Jack and their dog Rosie and was led on the hike by Visitor Services Supervisor Dan Byrnes. The Commissioner thanked everyone who helped plan and lead the events.

### Muddy River Ribbon Cutting

On November 29, the Commissioner attended the green ribbon cutting for the Muddy River Restoration Project, a significant climate resilience flood control and historic preservation project in the City of Boston and the Town of Brookline. This 20-year project was a collaboration between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, DCR, the City of Boston, and the Town of Brookline and addressed long-standing concerns about flood risk, environmental degradation, and historic preservation along the 3.5 miles of the Muddy River. Commissioner Arrigo thanked the DCR Design and Engineering team – especially Patrice Kish and Sean Grant - for their years long effort to bring this project to completion.

### ARPA Dam Announcement

On December 1, Commissioner Arrigo joined Secretary Tepper, Department of Fish and Game Commissioner Tom O’Shea, and Pittsfield Mayor Linda Tyer to announce $25 million in ARPA funding for the removal of eight unsafe dams in Central and Western Mass, including $20 million to remove the abandoned high hazard Bel Air Dam in Pittsfield.  In addition to the Bel Air Dam, $5 million will go to removing seven DFG dams that are no longer in safe condition across the state, making Massachusetts rivers more resilient and communities safer.  Removing the Bel Air Dam will restore the natural ecology of the area for wildlife and the West Branch of the Housatonic River to its natural course, creating new opportunities for recreation along the river.

### Hammond Pond Parkway

DCR announced an $11.3 million project to redesign Hammon Pond Parkway. The project is geared toward enhancing safety and accessibility for pedestrians and cyclists between Beacon Street and Route 9 in Newton.  It will also connect to nearby conservation areas, including Hammond Pond Reservation and the Webster Conservation Area. It will reduce the roadway from four travel lanes to two, install updated traffic signals, historic lighting, guardrails, and add new safe crossings at key points, including at Beacon Street and primary trailheads, to significantly enhance safety for all road users. Work is expected to be completed in 2025.

### Capital Budgeting

Commissioner Arrigo updated the council on DCR’s project to improve transparency around capital planning and capital project delivery. DCR hired Auribus Consulting, a Boston based management consulting firm with expertise in process improvement, capital planning, stakeholder engagement and technology procurement to assist the Department. The Commissioner said that they look forward to engaging members of the Council, DCR’s partners and the public in improving what is currently an opaque capital planning process.

### Net Zero Task Force Receives Award

On December 4, the DCR Net Zero Task Force was honored at the state house with a 2023 Leading by Example Award in recognition of their outstanding achievements in implementing sustainable practices and advancing climate change mitigation for the Commonwealth. The DCR Net Zero Task Force is a multi-disciplinary team of passionate individuals who are committed to making a difference by reducing DCR's greenhouse gas emissions and advancing sustainable practices. The Commissioner congratulated members of the task force: JP Allen, Stephen D. Brown, Celeste De Palma, Sean Gaffney, Derek Liimatainen, Robin Pfetsch, Sarah White, Raul Silva, John Masters, James Luke, Sean Mahoney, Barbara Farina, Alex Simmons, Ryan Hutton, Stephanie Sanidas, and Kathryn Ward.

### Performance Recognition Program Awards Ceremony

On November 16, DCR held its annual Performance Recognition Program Celebration in West Boylston and recognized nearly 100 staff members for their contributions to the agency and the Commonwealth over the last year. This year, five individuals and three groups were honored for their hard work and dedication to DCR, receiving citations from the Governor and Lt. Governor. The Commissioner said that he is more and more impressed with DCR’s staffs’ commitment and dedication to improving the vital connection between Massachusetts residents and their green spaces, adding that DCR is made up of hundreds of passionate public servants that are committed to improving the well-being of families across the state by protecting, preserving and enhancing our natural, cultural and recreational resources for generations to come.

### Forests as Climate Solutions

The Commissioner provided a brief update on the EEA Forest as Climate Solutions initiative, saying that EEA is on track to complete its review of the state’s climate-smart forest management practices. The Climate Forestry Committee has met many times since the initiative launched and is slated to release its recommendations soon. The committee’s report will be shared for public comment to inform the state’s response. The report will be circulated and posted on the webpage. EEA is keeping its commitment to reviewing and resuming the forestry program. EEA, DCR, and DFW will review the guidelines and all public input to determine next steps for new projects looking ahead.

### Stewardship Corps

Commissioner Arrigo spoke about the Stewardship Corps – a hands-on learning program for middle and high school students in the Greater Lawarence area, designed to foster the next generation of environmental stewards. On November 16, the Corps held its final session with a stewardship focused wrap up facilitated by Karim Glasgow and Priscilla Geigis at Lawrence Heritage State Park. Each student received a certificate and a copy of Peterson’s Field Guide to Birds to foster a further connection with nature. The gift was inspired by their very cool experience seeing our team catch and band live saw-whet owls. The Commissioner thanked the Lawrence Boys and Girls Club, the Stihl Corporation whose Hearts of Stihl grant funded the program, DCR staff that facilitated, staff at the Lawrence Heritage State Park, and DCR staff members Laura Sapienza-Grabski and Jess Rowcroft who helped coordinate the sessions.

### Motus Tower Installation

In November, DCR operations, forestry, and research office staff were involved in deploying a Motus tower at October Mountain State Forest. The tower is part of the Northeast Motus Collaboration, a series of towers used to passively track wildlife movement patterns, from birds and bats to butterflies and dragonflies. The system enables a community of researchers, educators, organizations, and residents to undertake impactful research and education on the ecology and conservation of migratory animals. There are towers located around the world on every continent except for Antarctica. This tower is a collaboration between DCR, MassWildlife, and the New Hampshire Audubon. Wildlife data collected by the tower can be viewed [on the Motus website](https://motus.org/data/receiverDeploymentDetections?id=10290).

### Special Deer Hunt for Paraplegic Hunters

Every fall, MassWildlife holds a three-day deer hunt for paraplegic hunters at select locations across the Commonwealth, including DCR’s Mount Washington State Forest.  Staff and volunteers help hunters travel to hunting locations across the state. This year the special season took place between November 2 and 4. Five hunters attended the event at Mount Washington, with over a dozen volunteers assisting. Each of the participants had an opportunity to see deer during their hunts and most had a chance to take a shot. One deer was taken home, and a great time and positive outdoor experience was had by all. Commissioner Arrigo thanked Dan White, Lead Supervisor at Mount Washington; Matt Roche, Lead Supervisor at October Mountain; and Travis Clairmont, Lakes District Ranger for all the work they put in to make sure this special event was a success.

### First Day Hikes

On New Years Day, DCR will hold its annual First Day Hikes. 2024 marks the 31st year of this signature DCR initiative, and the program has expanded to 13 parks across the state. Last year, more than 2,000 visitors kicked off their new year at 10 of our state parks with the program.

### Year in Review

Commissioner Arrigo said the following reflecting on his time at DCR over the last nine months:

“As this is our last meeting of 2023, I want to take this opportunity to wish all of you a wonderful holiday season and to thank you for all of your support and guidance over the last nine months.

As you know, my team and I have been working hard to improve the public perception of the agency and I think we’re well on our way.

We’ve expanded our communications team and they’ve made significant progress toward changing hearts and minds about the agency through more consistent, proactive internal and external messaging including engaging social media.

I’m sure you all remember our fun and successful Storrowing campaign, and the team is going to do more engaging videos to show the public all the great work we do at the agency to improve the well-being of residents across the state.

We've really been focusing our efforts on improving communication on all fronts – with legislators, the public, municipalities, our friends and partners, and of course all of you on the Stewardship Council.

We really value our partners at DCR and the great work we do wouldn’t be possible without their support and advocacy.

I want to end by saying I’m so grateful for your partnership and I look forward to building on it in the coming year. I’m incredibly proud to lead this agency and I look forward to all the great work ahead.”

### Councilor Questions and Comments

Councilor Harper asked about DCR’s hiring and how many hires were full time vs. seasonal positions.

Commissioner Arrigo responded that the agency is making the pitch to make longterm seasonal positions full time, and that they are more focused on full time employees. He said that the cap was lifted by 63 and that number does not take into account backfills. He said that one focus is to build a public affairs team that is regional and is committed to building trust within the regions with friends groups, legislators, and residents, similar to how the operations team works and being mindful that issues are different for different parts of the state.

Councilor Smiley thanked the Commissioner for the hiring push and said she is grateful for the focus on bringing longterm seasonals full time.

The Commissioner said that this is a recommendation from the Strategic Readiness Initiative and the Special Commission Report.

Councilor Crane asked about the Forests as Climate Solutions Initiative and the opportunity for the Stewardship Council to give comments.

Commissioner Arrigo said that the report will come out and there will be a public comment period and that the three divisions that do forestry work, DCR, DFW, and Watershed, will look at the recommendations and make decisions moving forward. He said that the council can make comments during the public comment period, but that they can also have discussions as DCR looks at the recommendations internally.

Councilor Ortiz thanked the Commissioner for attending the meeting on Morrissey Boulevard saying that the road is an important corridor for beaches in Dorchester and for commuters and that everyone came together makes it easier to work.

Councilor O’Shea added that he noticed the bridge on Morrissey Boulevard was stuck up and asked how older infrastructure like that factors into the rebuild.

Commissioner Arrigo said that he agreed that it was great to have everyone in the same room to discuss the project and that there is a lot being considered for the project, including the bridge mentioned by Councilor O’Shea.

Councilor Collins thanked the Commissioner for mentioning the MOTUS project saying that it’s a great partnership and part of an international project.

Chair Buckley said that he appreciated the comments on the capital planning work being done, adding that the Finance Committee recently met with Patrice Kish and that there seems to be a lot of energy for change. He also said that on forestry, the council has not been engaged the way that they expected to be. He said that he appreciates the Commissioners commitment to working with the council on comments that are received for the initiative and that he looks forward to being more involved. In addition, Chair Buckley said that forestry projects that are paused represent an economic impact for small rural communities and that once the process plays out, it will be over six months without the projects which bothers him.

Councilor Smiley agreed and thanked Chair Buckley for making that comment.

## Regular Business I

### DCR Golf Presentation – Jim Burke, Golf Operations Manager

Mr. Burke presented to the council about the Ponkapoag and Leo J. Martin golf courses and the Leo J. Martin ski track.

### After the presentation concluded, Councilors were given the opportunity for questions and comments.

Councilor O’Shea said that he is a third generation Ponkapoag golfer and that he was there on opening day after the renovations to the course were completed. He asked if Mr. Burke could identify what has happened to the course since then, noting that the agency spent $5 million on the course and that it has not held up.

Mr. Burke said that they are not back to square zero, but are halfway there. He said that after the course opened after the renovation, there were issues immediately with the reconstruction. He said the sprinkler system has too many heads, the bunkers are not maintainable with the staff that they have, the superintendent was not supported and quit midseason two years ago. He said that they are operating 36 holes with only one qualified agronomist, down from four. He said that the greens are what really need to be addressed.

Councilor O’Shea asked if funding was the issue.

Mr. Burke said that the issue was having qualified people to do the work. He said that the last two seasons they have had a position posted and they can’t find someone to fill it.

Councilor O’Shea commented that with over $2 million in revenue, it is probably one of the more popular DCR properties, and that after the $5 million investment it was great, but it could use improvement now and presents an opportunity for the state.

Councilor Wilson said that it would be great to have some collegiate events at Ponkapoag instead of the private club down the street.

Mr. Burke said that they have hosted collegiate events in the past, but because of the condition of the greens, it is hard to attract events like that.

Councilor Wilson asked about offseason use of Ponkapoag and what kind of activities occur there.

Mr. Burke said that they don’t discourage cross country skiing at Ponkapoag, but Leo J. Martin has groomed trails and snow making so it is a better location for the activity.

Chair Buckley said that it is an example of when you make a capital investment, you need to think it through and balance it with the operational budget.

Mr. Burke said that he doesn’t think it would take much to get the course back to where it was, and that if the course’s greens were better, they may not be having the conversation about the course.

Councilor O’Shea asked about the status of concessions at the courses.

Mr. Burke said that there is no one at the snack bar at Leo J. Martin, and that there is someone at the snack bar at Ponkapoag.

Councilor Smiley thanked Mr. Burke for everything that he has done. She added that she thinks the challenges faced by the courses are the ones faced in many industries right now. She asked if there was a consideration to add a skiing element similar to the one at Leo J. Martin to Ponkapoag.

Mr. Burke said that right now there is no plan to expand the ski operation.

### Approval of Minutes

Councilor Wilson made a motion to approve the minutes from the November 9, 2023 Stewardship Council meeting.

Councilor Smiley seconded the motion.

Councilor Collins said that he sent a minor edit to Mr. Perry.

Councilors Smith and O’Shea abstained.

The November 9, 2023 minutes were approved.

### Public Comment

[Guidelines for Public Comment are available on the DCR Stewardship Council website.](https://www.mass.gov/doc/dcr-stewardship-council-public-comment-guidelines/download)

Chairman Buckley invited members of the public for comment, which was offered by the following:

* Chris Egan, Mass Forestry Alliance
* Chris Mancini, Save the Harbor, Save the Bay

## Regular Business II

### Approval of the South Coast Resource Management Plans

Mr. Cavanagh presented the nine Resource Management Plans (RMPs) from the South Coast region. He also gave a brief update on the program. The RMPs will be voted on by the council at the December 14, 2023 meeting.

### After the presentation concluded, Councilors were given the opportunity for questions and comments.

Councilor Wilson thanked Mr. Cavanagh for his work on the RMPs and noted his response to concerns brought up by the policy committee at the last meeting.

Councilor Wilson moved to approve the South Coast Resource Management Plans.

Councilor Collins seconded the motion.

The council approved the plans.

### Voting for Council Officers

Councilor Wilson spoke on behalf of the nominating committee and said that they met twice and created a slate of Jack Buckley for Chair, Melissa Harper for Vice Chair, and Ann Canedy for Secretary. She thanked the candidates for their willingness to serve. She said that committee is focused on succession planning and has not been successful in finding a replacement for Chair Buckley. She said that the committee will meet again in February to discuss this issue more.

### Vote on Jack Buckley for Chair of the Stewardship Council

Councilor O’Shea moved to elect Jack Buckley Chair of the Stewardship Council for 2024.

Councilor Dooley seconded the motion.

Jack Buckley was elected Chair.

### Vote on Melissa Harper for Vice Chair of the Stewardship Council

Councilor Smiley moved to elect Melissa Harper Vice Chair of the Stewardship Council for 2024.

Councilor Collins seconded the motion.

Melissa Harper was elected Vice Chair.

### Vote on Ann Canedy for Secretary of the Stewardship Council

Councilor Ortiz moved to elect Ann Canedy Secretary of the Stewardship Council for 2024.

Councilor Collins seconded the motion.

Ann Canedy was elected Secretary.

### Committee Updates

Policy

Councilor Wilson reported that the Committee has been wrapping up this round of RMPs and will be taking a break in December.

Stakeholders

Councilor Smiley said that the committee met on December 1 and had a good discussion. They are currently working on an outline of 2024 meetings with locations. She said that public participation is a little down for the committee, and that they are looking to hold a listening session to address this. She added that they continue to push for outside groups to come and present to the council.

Finance

Chair Buckley said that the committee met with Director of Capital Planning Patrice Kish earlier in the week and that they are looking for the council to play a similar role with the capital budget that they do with the operational budget. He said that he is excited that the project dashboard is moving forward. He said that he included a Capital Budget 101 handout in everyone’s meeting packet to get them up to speed on the process.

### Councilor Comments

Councilor O’Shea thanked Mr. Burke for his presentation and thanked Mr. Mancini for being at the meeting, noting that he is a member of Save the Harbor, Save the Bay, and that he would like to see the organization give a presentation to the council on their work with DCR.

Councilor Dooley thanked the Commissioner for having a meeting about King’s Beach and Nahant to address concerns there.

Councilor Ortiz asked for updates on Edgewater Drive, the Stearns Building in Dorchester, and the project extending the path to the Blue Hills.

Councilor Harper commented that she would like to see connections built between the new regional public affairs staff and the council. She said that lots of folks reach out to the councilors and that it would be great to have someone that can keep the councilors educated on issues.

Councilor Collins said he recalls the presentation from the Friends of Leo J. Martin and the need for skiing improvements and that he was pleased to hear that those are happening from Mr. Burke’s presentation.

Councilor Smith thanked everyone for their understanding of his recent absence.

Chair Buckley said that coming into the State House, he dealt with four separate DCR rangers and that he thinks they should be out on the land instead of doing security. He also thanked the Commissioner for the regional approach to outreach.

## Adjournment

Councilor O’Shea moved to adjourn the meeting.

Councilor Smiley seconded the motion.

Councilor Buckley thanked everyone for joining and adjourned the meeting.

Please check the DCR Stewardship Council webpage for notice of upcoming meetings. <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dcr-stewardship-council>